Reviewer's report

Title: Midwives' Experiences of Performing Maternal Observations and Escalating Concerns: a Focus Group Study

Version: 0 Date: 03 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Hubert Amu

Reviewer's report:

Abstract

Well-written.

Background

1. Line 4 - 9. The authors do not provide any reference for the emphatic statement they made.

2. Line 9. "UK" should be written in full and the abbreviation put in parenthesis (United Kingdom (UK)) since it is not obvious that everybody around the globe will know that the authors are actually referring to the United Kingdom. After that then UK can be used throughout the rest of the manuscript.

3. It will be nice to know in one sentence, the basic function(s) performed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), which is/are relevant to the maternal observations reported in the preceding sentence.

4. What is "the normal range"? It is important for readers to know this, so that they can put the issues discussed into proper perspective.

5. Line 25 - 27. No citation. Refer your readers to some of these reports so that they can read them if they want to.

6. Line 34 - 39. The authors indicated that the "failure to complete observations and escalate action results in delays in intervention and increases the risk of maternal morbidity and has been a contributory factor in a number of avoidable deaths". However, the maternal mortality and morbidity situation in the study setting has not be mentioned anywhere in
the study. It is important that the authors provide such an information so that readers can put such a statement in proper perspective.

7. Line 42. What is "Modified Early Warning Scoring System (MEWS)"? It is important to briefly let readers know what this is. I think the authors in the text I have read so far, make it seem like every reader is aware of the terminologies being used. Please, clarify such terminologies and abbreviations so that readers would not be lost trying to put the study into perspective.

8. No citation "Yet, the recommendations made for the completion of maternal observations do not seem to have had a similar effect". I am concerned about citation for this sentence due to the use of the word "seem". Just want to be sure the statement is not speculative.

9. Page 5. The authors indicate that "the age at which mothers in the UK give birth is increasing and there are fewer births to younger women and more to older women". Even though a citation has been provided, no statistic is provided to justify the claim being made. I therefore that the authors provide some statistics to that effect.

10. "Furthermore, the statutory function of SoMs was deregulated in March 2017 and responsibility for monitoring standards of clinical care will now rest solely with the employer [17]." Who did the deregulation? Was there any special reason for that?

11. Page 6 Line 2. "appear to have had little effect". To ensure that this statement does not seem speculative, a citation should be provided to substantiate it.

12. It is important for the authors to at least a two sentence write up on "pre-registration standards [18]" to make readers know what they are.

The Literature

1. The opening sentence suggested that three papers were published on the topic. It is important to put the reference numbers of these papers into parenthesis right after the statement so that whoever wishes to read them would do so.

2. Line 28. "This returned a further 12 papers". I think the use of 'publications' would be more comfortable than 'papers'.

3. "The lack of staff was one of the most frequently reported barriers preventing the completion of observations". No citation.

4. "In the nursing literature, negative attitudes towards observations on the part of support staff were also implicated as contributing to non-completion." The publications indicating this should be cited.

5. Page 7, Line 14 "(Wheatley 2006)". I am sure this is an oversight which the authors should correct.

6. Page 7, 21 - 23. "In the midwifery literature, clinical location was identified as a factor affecting the completion of maternal observations." The publications reporting this finding should all be cited. It is not enough to just indicate "the midwifery literature".

7. Line 36. "Barriers to escalating concerns were also identified in both the nursing and midwifery literature". Citation needed.

Methods

1. Well-written.

2. I, however, do not see any write-up on the instruments used. The only thing I saw was that "Flexible topic guides were used to provide a format for the discussion, and included open-ended questions drawn from the literature." Were there two separate guides used? How many sections were there? How many items in all were in the instrument(s)? In this regard, I suggest the authors provide the instruments used as appendix to the manuscript in the revised version.

3. Even though the authors indicated that "an experienced second moderator completed contemporaneous field notes of non-verbal communication including eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions" and that "Audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher" nothing is said about inter-rater reliability. Was this ensured, and how? If not done, then the possible biases emanating from a single person creating the codes and themes as indicated in this statement; "Audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher (including pauses, laughter and prolonged silences), and augmented by the field notes" should be indicated as a limitation in the discussion section.
Results

1. Page 19, Line 19. "because the last the time" this should be relooked at to bring the meaning

2. The authors indicated that separate focus groups were created for midwives and midwife out. supervisors, and that the two groups were given MW and SM respectively in the quotes presented. However, Page 15, line 21 - 23 and Page 16, line 21 - 23 both have FG3 in the parentheses which followed the quotes and this suggests that both participants were in the same focus group. Is this a mistake or I am not getting something right. If it is a mistake, then the authors should appropriately address it.

In this regard, I suggest that the authors indicate in the methods section (Focus group structure), the chronology of the focus groups. For instance, groups 1 to 4 are for midwives and groups 5 and 6 are for supervisors of midwives.

3. Even though the authors indicated that "Data extracts from focus groups with midwives and supervisors of midwives are presented together, as findings were similar" they did not indicate whether the same instruments were used for both of the target groups or separate instruments were used as the only thing said about instrument was that "Flexible topic guides were used to provide a format for the discussion, and included open-ended questions drawn from the literature." This therefore reinforces my call for the instruments used to be discussed in detail as well as provided as appendices.

Discussion

1. The authors indicated that "The need to address this issue is becoming more urgent in light of the national shortage of midwives [42]" Nothing was, however, said about the health system and health worker availability in the country, in the background. I therefore suggest that the authors provide this information so as to give more perspective to the discussion. This is, however, notwithstanding the fact that the authors in the literature section indicated that "……which was attributed to reduced staffing during these times [21].", which I find to be inadequate to put the situation in the right perspective.

Conclusions

Well-written. I have no comments to make here.
General comments

1. The authors indicated that "Eighteen Midwives and 8 Supervisors of Midwives participated in a total of 6 focus groups". This should therefore make the total number of participants to be 26. However, in Table 1, the tallies for the frequency suggest that 23 individuals participated in the study. The authors should therefore streamline this inconsistency.

For instance;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Number (n=)</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group 20-29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the way, I think the age group "over 50" should rather be "50+" since age 50 is not catered for the in preceding age category.

Also, "Frequency" beside "(\%)" should be discarded and rather used to replace "Number".

2. Overall, I think the paper is a good one and is of high interest as experiences of health workers has become an important issue of exploration in the recent literature. I am particularly elated about the qualitative approach adopted at addressing the issue due to the in-depth insight it unearthed. The study would thus contribute immensely to both literature and policy and I applaud the authors for a rigorous research conducted.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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